



The Journey

Volume XXX No. 5
January 31, 2022
www.fcc-hsv.org

SHARING THE LOVE OF CHRIST

At a retreat several years ago, Rev. Dr. John Richardson opened the gathering with a brief devotion focused on mission. He began with a quote from John Steinbeck who wrote about his travels in America, "I did not take the trip, the trip took me." In response to this observation, Rev. Richardson reminded us that in the same way God is not ours, we are God's and the Church is not ours, we are the Church's.

In the gospel of John Chapter 15, Jesus told the disciples, "You did not choose me but I choose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name." This powerful statement reminds us that everything we have, everything we are, and everything we will be belongs to God. We are chosen to bear the fruit, the good news of Jesus Christ, to the ends of the earth and when we look beyond ourselves for our purpose we find that this is our mission.

Rev. Richardson also challenged us by asking why congregations often perceive growth as a threat and a personal loss. When we succeed in our mission, when others hear the message of Christ and respond, often we do not celebrate, instead we mourn a perceived loss of control and identity within the church. This loss is threatening to the comfortable nature of our community and so we distance ourselves from new members and new ideas until they fade away.

As we move forward in faith we must remember that central to the message of Christ is the love and acceptance of God. Since we are created in the image of God and are called to pattern our lives, and the Church, on Jesus, he becomes our model of love. Christ's love was open, accepting, full of forgiveness, and the hope of repentance and so we must model these traits. When we do we will find that the good news not only spreads through the world but it spreads through the Church and our lives filling us with the love, peace, and hope of God. Amen.

THE LADIES OF FCC are pleased to invite you to an all-church Baby Shower for Andrew and Alyssa Burton on **Sunday, February 13, at 10:30 a.m.** in the Commons Area and Parlor of the church. For the protection of the expectant mom, **attendees are asked to wear masks.** Fun and games will be had by all. The couple is registered at

For questions, contact Pastor Laura at laura@fcc-hsv.org



IN PERSON & ONLINE WORSHIP SERVICES

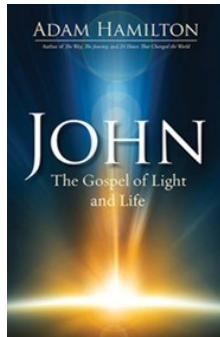
We offer in-person worship services Sunday mornings at 9:30 or you may also stream them live at 9:30, or watch previous services anytime, on facebook.com/fcchsv, twitch.tv/fcchsv, or youtube.com/channel/UCzQCRY8Vfa-IDhuqUnUhCKw

Deadline for the *Journey* is **Thursday, February 3**, at Noon. Email to: publisher@fcc-hsv.org

3209 Whitesburg Drive, Huntsville, Alabama 35802
Telephone: 256-881-0150 **Leave a message.**

**NEW LENTEN BIBLE STUDY
BEGINNING MARCH 3RD**

Please join us as we prepare our hearts and minds for Easter with a study of the Gospel of John, using as our guide, Adam Hamilton's book *John, the Gospel of Light and Life* (ISBN 13: 9781791021481). This book may be purchased on Amazon for \$11.24 (Hardcover) or on the Cokesbury website for \$12.99 (paperback). In this six week study, we will meet each Thursday beginning March 3rd in the Family Services Room at 10:00 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. to watch a video and discuss the week's lesson.



If you are interested, or have questions, please contact Lisa Fitzgerald at 256-++++ or ****

CHURCH CALENDAR

- Jan. 24 10:30 am Quilters
- Jan. 26 6 pm Men's Group
- Jan. 31 10:30 am Quilters
- Feb. 2 6 pm Men's Group
Phoebe Circle
7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- Feb. 7. 10:30 am Quilters
- Feb. 8 6 pm Elders' Meeting
- Feb. 9 6 pm Men's Group
7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- Feb. 10 6 pm Board Meeting
- Feb. 13 11:45 Community Outreach
- Feb. 14 **Happy Valentine's Day!**
9:30 am Esther Circle
10:30 am Quilters
5 pm Conveners' Meeting
- Feb. 16 6 pm Men's Group
7 pm Choir Rehearsal
- Feb. 21 **Church Office Closed**
10:30 am Quilters
- Feb. 23 6 pm Men's Group
7 pm Choir Rehearsal

ATTENDANCE

January 30 Worship Service: 66
Small Groups (During week & Sunday): 41



**SHORT TERM
PRAYER CONCERNS**



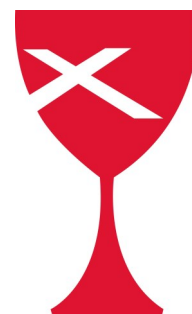
Not Published Online

We are temporarily publishing, as space allows, the prayer concerns that are normally listed in the Sunday bulletins. **Concerns are listed for one month unless we receive an update.** Long term prayer concerns are published monthly in the *Journey*. Send requests to publisher@fcc-hsv.org or call the church office at 256-881-0150 to leave a message.

Please notify the Pastors or the church office if you are going to the hospital and would like to be contacted

REGIONAL PRAYER REQUESTS

Edward Point Christian Church
Century, FL



IMAGINING LOVE

by Marilyn Pagán-Banks

“To be truly visionary we have to root our imagination in our concrete reality while simultaneously imagining possibilities beyond that reality.” - bell hooks (Feminism Is for Everybody)

I have learned much about the ethic of love and imagining this love embodied in some new ways thanks in great part to the writings of bell hooks, an ancestor too soon. Ashé.

Imagination - while not listed as a fruit of the Spirit - is vital to our ability to nurture, cultivate, and make space for the spirit to do its work.

We have to be willing to not only wish for a better world, a more just and loving society. We have to imagine that it is indeed possible. We must be able to know in our flesh and in our hearts that it is not only possible but probable.

Imagination gives us the wherewithal to begin to conjure up, call out, create, and live into the beloved community – even while it is not yet fully present. To live into our prayer of “on earth as it is in heaven.”

Imagination allows us to see beyond our current circumstance, condition, and context. Imagination makes space for us to create, re-create, and co-create. Imagination helps us to not give up when everything around us is cursing God, our communities, and all of creation.

Imagination caused God to become flesh and model for us what it means to love fiercely and fully.

Imagination gave bell hooks words and the courage to speak them and to write them so that Black women and Black folk might experience and share and pass on a love that is liberative.

Prayer

Thank you, God, for imagining us and creating us from a place of love. May we continue to pass on this miracle from generation to generation, in honor of our ancestors and in gratitude for the wonder of all of creation, Amen.

LOVE SO GREAT

Rev. Paul J. Allen IV

Sermon: Jan. 30, 2022

Scripture Verses:

Corinthians 13: 1-13

How do you feel? That is a question we ask quite a bit in today’s world. We are a people who are very interested in feelings. Watch the news the next time a disaster is reported on a TV channel. A reporter will thrust a microphone into the face of someone in obvious agony and ask, “Can you tell us how you feel?”

That is the question asked on Ellen, in the tabloids, and every talk show. Because above all else we want to feel good, we want to be happy and we will go to any lengths to lift our spirits. There is the idea in our culture that if we are not happy then something is wrong with us and so we bury the deep emotions of sorrow, regret, and pain fearing that we will make a scene or make others uncomfortable.

I think that while we may be a people who desire happiness we know very little about deeper emotions, even those that we desperately want because we are afraid of emotion. We are afraid of what lies inside of us because if we take a deep look we might like what we see.

However, we are followers of a God that knows about emotions rather than feelings. A God that weeps with us, laughs with us and loves us so deeply and abidingly that we cannot even begin to imagine the fullness of this love.

The Apostle Paul attempted to put this kind of love into words and gave us the beautiful passage of scripture we read today. This chapter is so well known that it is called the love chapter, but it does not speak of romantic love or even familial love. We have to understand that Paul was writing to a group of people who did not hold love in high esteem.

The church in Corinth had many problems. The poor were being disregarded and were not welcome at the table of the Lord. Members were boasting of the strength of their spiritual gifts and putting themselves before others who they saw as inferior.

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But more importantly to Paul, the Corinthians did not love one another. They did not sacrifice to meet the needs of their fellow Christians or the members of their community, nor did they dedicate themselves to the work of Christ. The Corinthians placed themselves high above the other churches in their area because of their wealth and status, but they did not understand the nature of Christian love.

For the people in Corinth religion had become focused on the attainment of a kind of religious high, an ecstasy that took them out of themselves and carried them far from the real world. They believed that a “true” Christian spoke in tongues, the language of the angels, and any who did not were considered less than.

Paul recognized the deep divisions within this church, but he did not dismiss their religious fervor outright. Paul believed that all spiritual gifts were equal and that every Christian possessed these gifts. That means that no Christian is gifted beyond another, we are all the beloved of God, and we are all given gifts to use in God’s service.

He knew that the Corinthians were proud and misguided, just as we all can be. So he offered them a better way to live. Paul taught them the importance of love.

Our image of love has been formed by our society. To us, love has become an emotion-filled with romantic sentimentality. Television shows, movies, books, and magazines all speak of love at first sight and passions that inflame the soul, but we do not talk about the work of love; the actions that express our feelings.

For Paul love was less of a feeling and more of a way to live and act in the world. He reminded the Corinthians that they could be empowered with all spiritual gifts, have faith that could change the world, understand the mysteries of the universe, give away all that they own, and live an ascetic life, but if these things are performed for the wrong reasons, if they are not done in a spirit of love, then they amount to nothing. For

Paul, all good things are worthless if they are not done in the spirit of love.

All too often we are inconsistent; we do the right thing for the wrong reasons or decide that we have done enough, that we can stop serving others, but Paul tells us that this is foolish. Love is the foundation of our faith and our lives, for without true and meaningful love we are nothing.

When Paul speaks of the nature of love he reminded the Corinthians of what love is not. Love is not envious, boastful, arrogant, or rude. It does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful, it does not rejoice in what is unjust.

Then Paul speaks of the positive qualities of love. Love is patient and kind, rejoices in the truth, it bears all things believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, love never ends.

Everything else in our lives will come to an end, except for love. Our success, the cost, and quantity of our possessions, our physical appearance, the power that we hold, the people that we influence, they will all fade away.

But the love of God, and the love that we have for each other, will never fail. Love is God’s greatest gift because it undergirds all of human life and gives meaning to an otherwise unintelligible world.

For Paul love is the model for Christian life, how we are to treat others in our family of faith and in the world. He believed that if you cooked Christianity down to its essence, boiled away all of the other concerns, you would find one thing that remains. What remains is not a doctrine, a set of rules, a creed, or a confession. When you take our faith to its core, what remains is love.

Maya Angelou wrote in her book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, that to be a friend, to really love someone, is to know the song their heart sings and to hum it back to them on the days when they forget how it goes.

To me this means that if we are to share the love of God the first thing we have to do is listen. Listen beyond words and meaningless expressions and truly hear the call of God in our lives. We

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Love continued ...

have to figure out how to live for others, understand how to love those people we do not agree with or even fear, we have to struggle with the understanding that we are called to love our enemies, realize that we are all lost and broken and that we all need to hear the melody of God's love in our lives.

But the good news today is that from the moment we are born to the moment we die, God is trying to teach us one thing. To love others as God loves us. That is the reason the apostle Paul was able to get at the center of the meaning of love when so many others have tried and failed. He realized that without God, true and meaningful love is impossible, but with God love is not only possible, it is the only outcome.

God is Love, and when we stretch ourselves beyond all expectations and begin to love one another, even to the point of the cross, we participate in that which is forever, from which nothing can separate us. Paul tells us that love is the greatest power we will ever know. How do we feel about that? Amen.



COVID-19 CHURCH PROTOCOLS

- **One 9:30 a.m. service** will be offered at least through May 2022. First Christian Church offers virtual services (facebook.com/fcchsv, twitch.tv/fcchsv, or First Christian Church Huntsville on YouTube) every Sunday. While FCC and State recommendations are good benchmarks, we invite all people to worship with us based on their comfort level.
- **Enter the church through the Bell Tower Garden/Narthex doors.** The doors by the church office are locked.
- **Wearing face coverings/masks at all times inside the church is encouraged for everyone.**
- Hand sanitizer and masks are available at the Lobby Welcome Table along with prepackaged communion elements.
- The **nursery** is open for the 9:30 a.m. service and the 10:30 a.m. small group time.
- **Every other row of pews is roped off on the pulpit side of the sanctuary to allow individuals to practice social distancing so that they may worship at their level of comfort. The front section on the pulpit side is the least impacted zone with our heating and cooling system.**
- **Attendees may vocalize** during the service, such as stating the Lord's Prayer, litanies, etc., and sing hymns/songs when lyrics are projected on the screens.
- Offerings may be placed in the brass plate when exiting the sanctuary or sent by mail.
- **Coffee is temporarily suspended.**
- **Small groups** (including Sunday school classes) will meet at **8:30 a.m. or 10:30 a.m.**
- Anyone with any symptoms will remain home and celebrate virtually for at least 10 days
- **Please notify the church office immediately if you develop symptoms after attending a service.**